

A Curious Landlord

BY W. W. PEN PENNY

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A CURIOUS LANDLORD

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BY
PEN PENNY

Pauline D. Gussie,
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A CURIOUS LANDLORD

I.

“**T**ELL, of all tiresome things, house-hunting is about the most so,” exclaimed Mrs. Morgan, as she sank into a deep-cushioned armchair and commenced pulling off her long suede gloves.

Her husband looked up with a smile as she entered. He was trying to put on a wheel that had come off a new toy, and their little four-year-old son stood so eagerly watching, to see if it could be mended, that he had not heard his mother enter. But at the sound of her voice he ran to kiss her and ask if she had brought the candy she promised.

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

"No, dear, I was too late. I will get you some to-morrow. I came very near missing the five-o'clock train," she said, turning to her husband.

"Yes, I was commencing to wonder what kept you," he replied. "I only wish business had not made it impossible for me to go with you. I fear you feel very tired. I wish I had not asked Newton to dine."

"Oh! that makes no difference," she answered. "I never regard Ned as company; besides, the ride in the train has quite rested me."

"There, your wheel is fast at last," Mr. Morgan said, handing the toy to the child, and Master Harry ran off to show the new cart to his nurse.

"Well, did you succeed in finding a house in B——?"

"Yes, I found one; but I did not like it

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

half as well as another I saw and which the landlord—or rather his agent—refused to rent to me.”

“Refused to rent to you !” echoed her husband, in surprise. And then, with a merry twinkle in his eyes, he commenced teasing her about not looking sufficiently well-dressed. “You know I told you when that suit came home the other day I did not like it. I guess the old codger thought you would not be prompt pay, and that was the reason he refused.” Then he added, more seriously, “Why did you not tell him you could give him reference or pay six months’ rent in advance, as long as he did not know you? That would have been better than renting a house you did not like as well.”

She laughed merrily.

“Oh ! the agent said he knew who you were very well. He knew your check

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

would be good for fifty thousand dollars, and it was just that that stood in the way. He told me that the owner never rented his houses to the wealthy. To satisfy me, he telephoned to the owner, who chanced not to be at his office to-day, but the answer came back, 'No! he regretted not to oblige me, but he could not break through his rules.' "

Mr. Morgan gave a long whistle.

"Excuse me, but is the man sane?"

The French clock on the mantel chimed half-past six, and almost at the same moment the door-bell rang.

"Oh! I guess that is Ned Newton. He lived for a short time in B——, I do wonder if he has ever met that curious landlord?"

Just then the library door opened, and the butler announced, "Mr. Newton."

Being an intimate friend he was at once

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

ushered into the library, where Mr. and Mrs. Morgan were sitting. After the first greetings were exchanged, Mr. Newton exclaimed :

“I will feel lost when you people move to B——.”

“We, also, will feel lost without our friends,” replied Mrs. Morgan, “that is, if they desert us. But I do not think B—— is at such a great distance that they need do that. I should regret it very much if we were going far away.”

“Ned,” exclaimed Mr. Morgan, “my wife met a mild kind of lunatic among the property owners at B——. Do you know him?”

“I do not think I number any lunatics among my acquaintances. What is his name?”

“Mr. Takall,” replied Mrs. Morgan. But I did not meet him ; I only saw his agent.”

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

“Yes, I know him,” said Newton, laughing. “He *is* a curious landlord. He is known by that title and also as the ‘angel of B——.’ His name does not suit him ; he is the last man in the world who would *take all*. And,” continued Newton, more seriously, “I assure you if all men had as sane ideas of justice and humanity there would be less misery in the world. Just wait until you get settled in B——, and I will enjoy coming down some day and taking you both to spend the evening with him. He never makes social calls except on a few intimate friends, whom he visits of a Sunday, for he is subject to rheumatism, and, therefore, thinks it best to avoid the night air ; but he is very hospitable, and gives a hearty welcome to all who call upon him. He is certainly a most original character and an excellent talker.”

II.

A FULL month had passed since the foregoing conversation, and the Morgan family were comfortably settled in their new home at B——.

“Ned Newton is coming down to dine to-night,” said Mr. Morgan, looking up from a letter he had just received. “He says: ‘If agreeable to you, we will spend the evening at Mr. Takall’s.’ He is anxious for us to meet the ‘curious landlord,’ the owner, he says, of no less than three hundred houses.”

“I must confess I am anxious to meet him myself,” said Mr. Morgan, with a smile; “but I still have my doubts regarding his sanity. However, some say we are all insane, more or less, on one subject or another, and he must be insane on

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

the subject of renting his houses to the impecunious."

The evening was delightful, so after a most delicious dinner, the three friends started to make the promised visit. On the way Newton pointed out a number of beautiful houses, of different sizes, owned by Mr. Takall.

Arriving at his home, which was a perfect palace in its elegance and beauty of design, and surrounded by magnificent grounds, they were ushered by the portly butler who answered the door into a luxuriously appointed drawing-room on the left-hand side of the spacious hall. The furniture, hangings, and pictures of this room were faultless. Everything was not only selected with the best of taste, but arranged and hung to the best advantage. A glowing wood-fire added to the charm of the room. Stretched in front of it, on a tiger-

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

skin, was a large greyhound. His thin neck, graceful head, and mild expression contrasted in a striking way with the thick neck, broad head, glaring eyes, and cruel-looking teeth of the stuffed head of the tiger rug.

In a few moments the host entered and greeted his guests in a most cordial manner. He was of medium height and build, with a well-shaped head, well set on a symmetrical body. Without being handsome, he had a pleasing face. His forehead was broad and his brows straight, resembling in a marked degree the foreheads and brows of some of our noted generals. His eyes, which were gray, were decidedly striking-looking. They seemed to look one through and through. They were eyes that talked, eyes that could express kindness, sympathy, and tenderness, could sparkle with merriment; but

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

one realized they were also capable of flashing with the fire of righteous indignation. His nose had the firm, chiselled look of a statue. His mouth was shaded by a heavy gray mustache, and the broad chin harmonized well with his other features. A voice that was rather deep, but musical, would have inspired trust even in a cynic. When he stopped speaking one felt anxious for him to speak again.

After talking for a while on indifferent topics, at least indifferent as far as Mr. Takall's character as landlord was concerned, Mrs. Morgan said :

"I think I am very forgiving, Mr. Takall, to call upon you to-night, after your being so unkind as to refuse to accept me as one of your tenants."

"Perhaps, if I had seen you, you might have induced me to break through my rules," he replied, with a smile.

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

Mrs. Morgan was a very pretty woman.

"Is it true," asked Mr. Morgan, "that you only rent your houses to strugglers?"

"No," he answered; "but I never rent to persons who are known to be wealthy. I rent to those of moderate means and to those of uncertain incomes, as doctors, lawyers, artists, teachers, and persons who are not their own masters, but are holding positions. Only God knows how many strugglers there are among them. A year when there is little illness is a bad one for the doctors, and especially for those who have not made a name. A lawyer who is not noted may not always have a sufficient number of clients to net him a living, or if he has they may be too impecunious to pay him promptly. A few months' idleness, or some unlooked-for expense, such as a serious illness or accident, may so encroach upon a slender income as

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

to make it impossible for one to pay rent promptly or meet their other obligations.

“I am not one who believes that people who don’t pay their debts promptly are able but unwilling to do so, and require to be forced by law. I believe that not only ninety-nine out of every hundred, but nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand that don’t pay cannot pay. And I think if our Almighty Father had made it possible for persons when unable to buy food to be nourished by the air they breathed, that few indeed would go into debt for the pleasure of eating. I have heard people say, ‘Oh! I would sooner live on a crust than go into debt, or ask aid.’ I say let them try it, and see how they feel.

“Everyone with any intellect knows that good food, and sufficient of it, is necessary to keep one in health. Proper shelter is

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

necessary also. All my houses, from the humblest to the best, are in perfect repair—heating and plumbing all that can be desired. If anything gets out of order it is at once attended to, and all are treated alike, those who are prompt pay and those who are behindhand receive the same attention. Why, I have known landlords refuse to make the most necessary repairs where people were in arrears, and then, after imposing upon them in every way, sell them out.

“If I had one of my leases here I would show it to you. Those who sign it agree to pay me promptly the first of each month, *if possible*. I always rent from the first of the month ; it saves trouble. I agree in the lease to keep the house they rent in thorough order, and not to distress or sell them out for arrears of rent, and not to turn them out.”

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

“Well!” exclaimed Mr. Morgan, “I would like to know how much you lose each year? Remember all are not as fortunate in this world’s goods as you are, and even if willing could not afford to be as philanthropic.”

A stern look came into the gray eyes as they were turned on Mr. Morgan, and he replied:

“If you have ever been so cruel as to sell anyone out, regret it, but do not try to excuse it, even if you were poor at the time and in need of money. But,” he said, as he regarded Mr. Morgan’s kindly face, “I do not believe you ever sold anyone out.”

“I never did,” answered Mr. Morgan, with a smile. “I do not believe I could bring such distress upon anyone, unless, perhaps, I was starving; and I think, even then, at the last moment, I would relent.

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

But I have heard other property owners say they were obliged sometimes, much as they regretted it, to have a constable's sale, in order not to lose their rent."

"They should have been willing to lose it, if that was the only way of collecting it," replied Mr. Takall. "In every business, and in all the professions, one must take the risk of losing as well as the chance of gaining. Why not, then, in renting houses? It might not be possible for all to be willing to wait indefinitely, as all could not afford it; but they could give the tenant notice to leave.

"I consider a constable's sale one of the greatest outrages of a civilized, let alone a christianized, community. Look at the punishment for arson! Would anything excuse it? Even if the man owed the perpetrator of the deed thousands, and it were possible for him to obtain it by

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

destroying his home, would he be excused? And is not a constable's sale arson in another way? It is destroying a home, scattering to the four winds of Heaven articles necessary for even the humblest abode, and other possessions often held dear from associations, such as ornaments, pictures, and books that are, perhaps, gifts from a dead parent or husband; things that no money could replace. And is life not also endangered by the excitement and misery that such a sale causes? Slavery existed for a time and the debtor's prison was once thought necessary. Now they are looked upon as barbarous. I hope to live to see the day when constables' sales will be regarded in the same way and abolished."

"You are right, Mr. Takall," exclaimed Mrs. Morgan. "It is indeed barbarous to sell a person's possessions when they are so unfortunate as to be unable to pay, for

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

now in renting houses persons are obliged to waive even the three-hundred-dollar exemption law, so a landlord can take everything. But," continued Mrs. Morgan, "how in the world did you come to think of so novel a charity?"

"Do not call it charity," he replied. "It is simply showing humanity. Man's inhumanity to man makes many of our charities necessary. How I came to think of renting my houses only to persons who were not so fortunately placed as to be above the possibility of getting into difficulties is a long story. But I will tell it to you if you care to hear it.

"First, however, I will answer your husband's question as to how much I have lost by my plan of renting. I have been a large property owner now for over twelve years. During that time I have gained, over and above the income derived

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

from the rentals, exactly five thousand seven hundred dollars."

The three listeners looked at him incredulously, and he continued :

"I do not mean to say I have not lost through some persons, but what I gained has covered what I lost, and has given me the above-named profit. For instance :

"I rented a house to a young couple and they paid me for a while promptly, then the husband was taken ill and they were unable to meet their rent. They lived in the house for over two years, rent free, when the poor fellow died, and the young widow went home to her own people. That money I lost.

"I also lost six months' rent through another party, a year and some months through another, and so on.

"Then I rented a house to a poor old teacher and her niece. The old lady was

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

no longer able to teach, and the interest on what she had saved during her long years of drudgery brought her only a very slender income. Her niece, a very delicate girl, had considerable ability with her pen. She wrote for different magazines and papers. When her articles were accepted they had not such a hard struggle, but at other times I fear their life was one of constant privation—which often means starvation. I chanced to know a good deal about them through a friend. At last, hearing that the young lady was ill, I wrote to her aunt and said, as long as the house they were renting of me was without some of the modern improvements, such as electric gas-lighting, stationary tubs, etc., that I was unwilling to accept any rent from them until I made these improvements, and I was not ready to make them for some time.”

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

"How kind that was of you," exclaimed Mrs. Morgan, regarding Mr. Takall with genuine admiration.

"No," he replied. "I pitied them and it deprived me of nothing I required. Do not think I am telling you this to show you what you consider my good deeds, but so as to explain how I have been the gainer. The poor old lady wrote me a most grateful note, saying, 'She did not think it fair that I should receive nothing for such a comfortable home, but as her niece's illness added to her expenses, she would accept my kindness of house-rent free for a while.' The girl's illness terminated fatally in less than a year. Her aunt was heart-broken and did not long survive her. Being without any other relative, she left her small savings of eight thousand dollars to me in 'consideration of the kindness I had shown her, and, if pos-

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

sible, to insure me against any losses I might suffer in being kind to other tenants.'

"Another man who went West, in my debt for three years' rent, and whom I never expected to hear from, wrote me the other day that he had come into a fortune left him by an uncle. He enclosed me a check, with interest, for his past indebtedness, and five thousand besides in appreciation of my kindness.

"Christmas-time the mince-pies and cakes I receive from my numerous tenants, I would like you to see them! You must not tell what I do with some of them, for it might offend the senders. But as I have only one stomach, I cannot eat them all, so they just save me the expense of a donation to two homes I always remember. One is for aged men and the other for widows and single women.

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

"The other Christmas presents I give are rather monotonous; they are a receipted bill to each tenant for the month of December.

"And now," said Mr. Takall, rising and offering his arm to Mrs. Morgan, "let me ask you out into the dining-room before I tell you how I came to be such a lenient landlord."

It was like going only from one paradise into another, for the dining-room was as charming as the drawing-room, only in a different way.

Mrs. Morgan glanced around with delight. Being of an artistic nature she keenly appreciated the display of taste and beauty. Then her eyes fastened themselves on a portrait, and she stood wrapt before it. Hanging as it did on the same side of the room as the entrance she had not caught sight of it until well into the room.

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

“Oh! how lovely she is, and what a beautiful child!” she exclaimed.

It was the portrait of a young and very handsome woman. Gray eyes, with long black lashes, gazed with a smiling expression from the canvas, and the full but well-shaped lips looked ready to part and speak. The hair, that was rather loosely arranged, was of the shade that Titian loved to paint.

The child, that could not have been more than three years of age, was a little beauty. He sat on the arm of the large cushioned chair in the most graceful attitude. One chubby little hand was resting on his mother's shoulder, while her arm was around him, and the small feet, with short stockings and little slippers, were slightly crossed and rested against the folds of his mother's satin gown in the most artistic manner.

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

Something about the straight brows and full rounding chins of both mother and child reminded Mrs. Morgan of Mr. Takall, and she glanced involuntarily at him.

As he met her rather questioning glance he answered :

“That is a portrait of my sister and her child. Both are dead.”

He sighed slightly as he turned his glance to the corresponding place on the wall at the other side of the door, where hung the half-length portrait of a very striking-looking man. His hair and eyes were black and his features regular. The attitude was so real it seemed hard to believe that he was not flesh and blood. He stood, palette and brushes in hand, as if he had just turned from his work to speak to some one. Both portraits were executed by a master-hand.

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

Mrs. Morgan's glance was now directed to this portrait.

"He was my sister's husband," continued Mr. Takall, "and an artist of marked ability, as you see by these portraits he painted. But he did not live long enough to become famous, and, like many other men of genius, he died poor and in debt, leaving nothing for the support of his wife and child."

The large and handsomely carved mahogany table that stood in the centre of the dining-room looked as if it should have been the gathering-place of a large and happy family, instead of where a solitary bachelor took his meals. At present it was beautifully arranged. The brilliantly polished silver, sparkling cut-glass and exquisite china added to the daintiness of the refreshments, which consisted of deli-

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

cious hot-house fruits of several varieties, cake, and wine.

While partaking of the refreshments the conversation turned on travel. The room contained many ornaments and costly curios that had been collected in foreign lands, and which were admired and examined by the visitors. They soon found that Mr. Takall had visited nearly every portion of the globe.

“You seem to care so much for home,” exclaimed Mrs. Morgan, “that I had no idea you were such a traveller.”

He smiled sadly as he answered :

“Although I am fond of travelling, under some circumstances, I might not have been such a wanderer, but it was after my home was broken up that I sought distraction in travel in order to save my mind. But the love of home is born in all the human race. I appre-

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

ciate and sympathize from the bottom of my heart with those who are homeless. In every land and in every clime, from the highest to the lowest, from the palace of the king to the hovel of the serf, I have found that all have a love of home and hold their possessions dear, be they great or small. And now I will tell you how I came to be what I am called, 'a curious landlord.' ”

He sighed, and his brows contracted an instant, as if in pain. Then he continued :

“ I was not always wealthy—large means I have only possessed the past fourteen years, but I was comfortable. I held a good position, and was able without difficulty to meet my expenses. My father at his death had left little, and that little was settled on my only sister, my mother having died many years before. I was unable to buy a home, so we continued living in

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

the house my father had rented. It was a comfortable one and furnished with many articles we greatly valued, for they had been in the family for several generations. My father left a valuable library, and this we highly prized.

“When my sister married, she and her husband agreed that we would all live together. So her wedding presents and articles belonging to her husband that had adorned his bachelor apartments were also brought to beautify our home. It was a snug abode.

“A few happy years we were together, and then my brother-in-law died, and my sister and her child were left for me to support. Her husband had been unable to make any provision for her, and had lost the small amount she possessed in some unlucky speculation.

“Having no family of my own to sup-

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

port, I was able to provide for my sister and her child, and for a time all went well. Then I was taken seriously ill. My employer continued my salary for some weeks, and waited before engaging anyone else to fill my position, in the hope that I would be able to return to my duties. But when he found that if I recovered at all it would be months before I would be able to resume work, he was obliged to fill my place.

“Instead of getting better I grew worse, my recovery being retarded by the keen anxiety I felt over my business affairs, and the knowledge of the difficulty I would have in providing for those I loved if my ill-health continued.

“At last the doctor said the only chance I had of regaining my health and of ever being able to work was in taking an entire change. He advised a sea voyage. I

A C U R I O U S L A N D L O R D

could not afford it. We were already in arrears for rent, and the little I had laid by was being used for living expenses. I felt distracted.

“It was just at this time that a friend, who owned a yacht and knew what my doctor advised, came and begged me to accompany him on a trip in Southern waters. He said that if he were able he would assist me financially so as to relieve my mind, but at least to give him the pleasure of trying to restore my health. I felt loath to go. But my sister’s persuasions, added to my friend’s, and also the knowledge that if I did not go I might either die or remain a helpless invalid, induced me to consent.

“Before leaving, I went to see our landlord. I told him at the present time I was unable to meet my indebtedness, but that he should not be the loser. He promised

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

to wait. I had, however, a strange feeling of uneasiness. Had I known the man's true character I would never have trusted him. But being honorable myself, I was not on the lookout for deception in others, so I attributed my nervous fears to ill-health. If I had had any property of value to place in his hands as security I would have done so. But all I had was a few acres of unimproved Western land that was not considered of sufficient value to even cover what I already owed him. Being a keen business man, I knew he would refuse such security. By offering them I would be laying bare my entire financial condition. He would at once ask if I had nothing else to offer. So I thought it was best to keep him in ignorance of how desperately I was cornered. Not that I would defraud him of a dollar, but I wished to gain time. I knew if my health was

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

restored I would soon be able to pay him, and if I died my life insurance would cover all my debts, and leave my sister a small amount besides.

“At parting, however, I placed these securities in my sister’s hands, telling her in case of trouble over the rent, should he not keep his word, to offer them to him. I thought, perhaps, he might accept from a woman what he would refuse to take from a man. ‘At all events, if you have any trouble with him, write me at once.’

“We parted. Little did I think it would be never to meet again in this world. Several months passed. Gradually I gained health and strength. I was not entirely well, but I felt I would soon be able to take up the work of life again, and I looked forward with joy to returning home. During these months I heard from my sister regu-

A C U R I O U S L A N D L O R D

larly, for I always wrote and told her where our next stopping-place would be, and a letter always awaited me on my arrival, until we came to the last place but one that we intended visiting before turning our faecs homeward.

“It had been fully three weeks since I had last heard from her, for we had visited the Bermuda Islands and my friend had stayed there longer than he at first intended. So we were some days over time in arriving at our destination.

“I therefore felt a strange uneasiness when they told me at the post-office that there was no letter for me. My friend joked and told me my nerves were not yet in a healthy condition, that the letter must have miscarried, or not have been posted in time. We returned to our hotel, took dinner, and then I again went to the post-

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

office, only to receive the same reply, 'No letters.'

"As I reached the hotel my friend stood on the steps waiting for me.

" 'Jack,' he said, 'here is a telegram for you.'

"I tore it open in nervous haste. It stated my sister was ill and asked me to return as soon as possible. We took the midnight train North. My friend insisted on accompanying me, leaving his yacht for his captain to bring home. Never will I forget that journey or the agony I endured when I reached my home.

"The hack stopped in front of the house. It was closed; a sign of 'to rent' was upon it; the remnants of a constable's placard still adhered where it had been pasted. My head swam, the sight seemed to pass from my eyes. I believe I would

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

have fallen if my friend had not quickly grasped my arm.

“Then a next-door neighbor, who had evidently been watching for me, came quickly out to meet us, and said, ‘Come into my house, your sister is here.’ ”

Mr. Takall stopped as if unable to proceed. His face had grown pale, he wiped the perspiration from his brow, and the look of agony which had come into his face seemed to have aged him.

As Mrs. Morgan regarded him she thought he looked years older than the host who had greeted them but a short time before, and she exclaimed, with tears in her eyes :

“Oh ! Mr. Takall, I am so sorry I asked you to tell me what had made you so lenient to your tenants. I did not know it was so sad a story.”

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

“Do not regret it,” he replied, gently. “If the recital of it gains but one advocate who is willing to do all in his power to abolish this torture that is being perpetrated under the guise of law, then my story will not have been told in vain.”

He sighed deeply as he continued:

“Little by little they broke the dreadful news to me. Both my sister and her child were dead. Her little boy had been taken ill before the constable levied on our household goods.

“She wrote to the landlord begging him not to sell her out, telling him of her child’s illness, saying I would soon be home and able to pay him. And she offered him the securities I had left with her. He promised to accept them, but said ‘he would still hold the lien on her things,’ and would write and make inquiry about the value of the securities she offered.

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

“ He wrote, found they were considered of little value, and that he would gain more by the sale than by accepting them, so he pushed his claim. She had written to me, but the letter never reached me.

“ When she found she could do nothing with the owner of the property, she begged and pleaded with the constable to wait, but he refused. Neighbors and friends tried to persuade him to postpone the sale ; but as they were unable to pay the amount owing, he refused to comply with their request. He even insisted on going into the room where the sick child lay. It was this that killed my sister, for the doctor had told her to keep the boy perfectly quiet, and that he would go to the owner of the house and tell him the child was dangerously ill, and if he obliged him to be moved it might cause the child's death, and he would then be responsible.

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

“My sister dropped dead while imploring the constable not to compel her to move her child, he was too ill. The little fellow died that night from grief and exhaustion, for he called continually for his mother to come to him. He had never been parted from her, and he could not understand why, when he was in pain, she would not come to him.”

Mr. Takall paused a moment, and involuntarily raised his eyes to the portrait of the two who had been so dear to him. As he did so the large greyhound jumped up from the rug and came and leaned his head against Mr. Takall's knee and gazed at him with a mute, appealing look, as if he understood the conversation and would try and comfort him.

“Just see,” exclaimed Mr. Takall, as he stroked the dog's head, “the sympathy in his eyes. Yes! I would sooner be a dumb

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

brute than a human being without heart, without feeling for the suffering of others.”

His eyes flashed as he continued:

“Do you wonder that I cursed the two men who, for the sake of gain, had caused such misery to the ones I loved, and brought such agony and desolation upon me? I did. I prayed that God might visit retribution upon them—and I have lived to see my prayer answered. The landlord’s own home was burned while he was away for a few days on business, and his wife and only child perished in the flames. This occurred a little over a year after the murder of my sister and her child. Yes! I call it murder. What befell the constable I will tell you of later.

“For a while I felt half-crazed by my grief. Friends begged me to stay with them for a few months at least, but I refused, for I felt as if I could not inflict my

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

miserable presence upon anyone. I rented a small room in a cheap lodging-house, took my meals when and where I pleased, and sometimes went without them. I sought for a position, for I knew I must get one if I was to exist.

“I wished to obtain a night position, so as to have my days free ; for a perfect mania took possession of me to follow that brute of a constable, to attend every sale I saw advertised that was going to be conducted by him ; to see with my own eyes the misery that is being perpetrated in a Christian land. Great God ! what agony I have seen. Many a time I have spent almost my last dollar and gone hungry that I might use the money to relieve, in some measure, the distress I witnessed ; to purchase some needed or cherished article, or to pay for temporary quarters for those turned into the street.

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

"Illness, even death, does not stop a constable from what he calls 'the discharge of his duty.' He is paid, so he does not care, and the more he is able to make out of a sale the better is he pleased. And as there are always those among the lower types of humanity who are ready to profit by the distress of others, he has no difficulty in getting plenty to come and buy things, often for a mere nothing compared with their actual value, and then resell them at a profit, in which the constable shares. Such people are the birds of prey of the human race. They care not for the misery, only for the gain.

"I saw one woman crazed by a constable's sale. When they began disposing of her goods, she commenced screaming and throwing around and breaking everything she could lay her hands on. Poor

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

soul ! she never recovered, and to-day is an inmate of a lunatic asylum.

“ Another woman was thrown into convulsions and died shortly afterward.

“ I saw one poor man who had lost his position, and had a sick wife and young family, blow out his brains when he found he could not prevent the sale. He did it so quickly that no one could stop him. The misery of seeing his family homeless was more than he could endure. He was a man of marked ability, and had once been prosperous, but through an unfortunate combination of circumstances had lost heavily. If he had been given time and not pushed to the wall, I feel sure he would have been able to have paid every dollar he owed, and to-day might have been among the successful. The shock of his suicide killed his wife, so that the constable's sale was responsible for two lives.

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

“But enough. I will not tell you more of the sad sights I witnessed, except the last sale I went to. It was at the house of two old women. One was a music-teacher, the other a seamstress. On arriving at the house it was closed, and a number of persons were standing outside waiting for admittance. After the constable had tried in vain to gain entrance by repeated rings at the bell, he entered through a side window. In the bed-room both old ladies lay, fully dressed, dead upon the bed. Pinned beside them was a note stating that they had taken poison, and hoped that God would forgive them. They were too old to do any hard work, and, as they would lose their piano and sewing-machine, their means of making even the barest living would be taken from them.

“And to think the man who owned their home was wealthy and a church-member.

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

The very next week after his inhumanity to them he gave five hundred dollars toward a home for aged women, and his name was in all the papers. He was spoken of 'as a kind, generous philanthropist, a *true* Christian, ever ready to do good.' 'Reputation is what men know of us; character what God knows of us!'

"I knew a clergyman," continued Mr. Takall—"he's a bishop now—who when he read the lines in the prayer-book 'that all who profess and call themselves Christians, and, etc.,' would always emphasize the word 'profess,' and pause as if he wished to give his listeners time to examine themselves and see if they were really what they professed to be.

"The next constable's sale I saw advertised I felt too ill to attend. My own sufferings and the constant misery I witnessed, and which I was powerless to

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

relieve to any great extent, were commencing to tell upon me.

“About this time the friend I had travelled South with died and left me a small legacy. I determined to quit work and travel, to try to find distraction in foreign lands, amid strange scenes, for the desolation I experienced seemed to grow greater as time went on.

“In less than a week I was ready to sail. Before starting, however, I wished to visit some old friends who lived a short distance from the city. I was standing waiting for my train, looking with indifference at the hurrying crowd, when suddenly I saw a stretcher lifted from the train that had just steamed into the station. I realized at once someone had been injured, for on the stretcher lay a form. I could not see whether it was a man or a woman, for the crowd became dense as soon as it was

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

known that an accident had occurred. Then I caught the disjointed sentences of several men who were in advance of those who were carrying the stretcher. 'Served him right,' said one. 'I don't pity him,' said another. 'Retribution has overtaken him at last; he can't live; it will be one devil less on earth,' said a third. The crowd had brought the men to a halt alongside of me.

" 'Who is injured?' I asked.

" 'Oh! that brute of a constable,' answered the last speaker. 'He tripped as he was hurrying to cross the track to catch the train at a station not more than ten miles from here; fell and both his arms were cut off just below the elbow by a freight train.'

" 'I guess,' continued one of the other men, 'he was so blinded by passion he did not see the train coming. He had a pretty stiff time of it conducting a sale;

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

had words with some of the neighbors who pitied the poor young woman, who was about to become a mother, and he got into a towering rage. She, poor thing, was taken into a neighbor's house, and we were told she was dying when we came away. We live near; did not know them well, but did all in our power to induce the brute to postpone the sale. It was useless, because we had not the money to hand out. The poor young woman's husband is a travelling salesman, and is sick in a distant city. A young doctor on the train thinks he can save the constable's life.'

"Just then we were asked to move to allow the men to pass who were carrying the stretcher. There, before me, pale and unconscious, with both arms bandaged, lay one of the only two beings I have ever cursed, and one of the only two for whose sufferings there awoke in my heart no

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

answering pity. As I gazed at him for an instant as he was carried past me, I could not help thinking that his hand, at least, was powerless to ever ring the bell of misery again.

“But, as if to refute the thought that good would be accomplished by his death or helplessness, there came the words of one of the men who still stood near me. ‘Alas!’ he exclaimed (in answer to one of his companions who had said the world was well rid of such a brute), ‘there are plenty of other devils ready to take his place and help torture people to death for pay!’

“The young doctor was able to save the man’s life. He is alive to-day, strong and well, but helpless. He is the inmate of a home for cripples, for his wife refused to take care of him.”

Mr. Takall paused a moment and sighed deeply, then he continued:

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

“I travelled abroad for over two years. Then as my funds were getting low, I thought it was time to return and work again.

“However, on landing, I found myself a millionaire. On the land my sister offered as security, and that had been considered worthless, there had been discovered some of the richest gold ore in the country. My prayers to be able to do good were answered, the power to relieve distress was mine. My fortune had come too late to give pleasure to those I loved or to prevent their misery, but not too late to help others in need of assistance. If one cannot have happiness of his own, the next best thing is to make some one else happy. In some measure one gets the reflection of brightness, just as when we witness misery we cannot avoid the shadow that it casts.

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

“A recent writer says, ‘The world is becoming more sensitive to suffering, more anxious to devise ways and means to prevent and relieve it.’ He remarks: ‘Civilized man generally recognizes far more fully than he did even a century ago the inexpediency or the wickedness—as we may be pleased to regard it—of inflicting torture and wretchedness upon his fellow-man.’

“If such is the case, constables’ sales will surely be abolished—but it will take time, for, as the same writer remarks: ‘The beneficiaries of an existing wrong will always resent interference with the craft by which they get their gain. There will be no change unless the demand for it is strong enough to force the fist of selfishness to relax its grip.’

“I may not live to see the day,” said Mr. Takall, a little sadly, “but I hope it is

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

not far distant when it will not be legal to attach household goods or a man's home, if he owns one, for any debt he may owe. If everything else is taken, let these, at least, remain. Many a drowning person has been saved by a solitary plank. In financial shipwreck, I say let homes and home surroundings remain as planks to enable those who have met with misfortune to gain a surer foundation. It will give them better strength and courage to struggle."

All had listened to Mr. Takall's narrative with the greatest interest and sympathy. As he finished, Mrs. Morgan extended her hand and said with the deepest earnestness :

"You have gained at least one champion for your cause in me."

"I think you have gained three," exclaimed Mr. Morgan and Newton.

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

"I will never," continued Mrs. Morgan, "after what I have heard to-night, read the notice of a constable's sale with indifference, but will endeavor to do all in my power to relieve the distress of those who are to suffer the death of their home."

"You could not have expressed it in a better way," exclaimed Mr. Takall. "Such a sale is indeed the death of a home."

"But, I fear," said Mrs. Morgan, rising, "we have been so interested in all you have told us that we have stayed far past your usual hour for retiring."

"No," replied Mr. Takall, with a smile, as he touched a small bell on the table, "I never retire early. Trouble and sleep are not very good friends, and as the first has been my companion for a number of years, the other is only an uncertain guest."

While Mr. Takall was speaking his waiter entered, in answer to the bell, and

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

handed him a most beautiful bunch of "American Beauty" roses.

"These," said Mr. Takall, "are from my hot-house. I ordered them cut for you."

"Oh! how lovely they are," exclaimed Mrs. Morgan, with genuine delight.

As he handed them to her, he remarked:

"I hope you forgive me for refusing you as a tenant."

* * * * *

It was rather a silent trio that walked home that night. The conversation of the evening had given each one a good deal to think about. Presently, however, the silence was broken by Newton, who turned to Morgan, and asked:

"Say, old fellow, have you still doubts regarding our host's sanity?"

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

“No,” he answered, gravely. “My doubts are set at rest. I wish more possessed his humanity; it would, indeed, be a different world.”

“I think he is a dear, old angel,” exclaimed Mrs. Morgan. “I have quite lost my heart to him.”

“I wonder,” continued Newton, “why the old codger has never married. Perhaps some evening he may enlighten us on the reason of his bachelorhood.”

“I know why,” exclaimed Morgan, laughing. “It is because he did not meet Mrs. Morgan before I did.”

III.

Many pleasant evenings Mr. and Mrs. Morgan spent with the lonely old man during their two years' residence in B——. Afterward they travelled abroad for over a year. On returning, they settled down in the old home they were about moving from when our story opened.

Mrs. Morgan had been busy directing the unpacking and arrangement of numerous articles brought from abroad. The house was now in comparative order and the rooms commenced to look cheery and homelike. It was with a sigh of relief that she sank into one of the easy chairs in the drawing-room to rest. Picking up the evening paper that lay on the table near her, she turned it over with indiffer-

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

ence until her eye caught the heading of one of the columns on the third page :

“A STRANGE WILL—LEFT BY THE LATE MR. TAKALL, who was known far and wide as ‘The Curious Landlord;’ or, ‘The Angel of B——.’

“Being in the possession of all my faculties, I, John Takall, make now, in the sight of God, my last will and testament.

“As I am without any relatives that affection or duty might make me desire or feel compelled to remember, I am entirely free to dispose of my estate as I wish.

“‘We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.’ It would be well for us all to remember these lines, and do all the good in our power while living, and in contemplating the ending of ‘this painful life,’ endeavor to dispose of our estate so as to relieve some of the misery of which the world is full.

“I desire that all my just debts and funeral expenses be paid.

“I give and bequeath to my friend and lawyer, Mr. ———, my house and its be-

A C U R I O U S L A N D L O R D

longings, and fifty thousand dollars, on condition that he will do all in his power to have constables' sales abolished; and until he is successful in so doing, attend all such sales that are advertised to take place within a radius of fifty miles, and relieve the distress of those who are about to be so tortured from a fund I will leave in his hands for that purpose.

“To each of my tenants I leave the house they are at the present time occupying and a sufficient sum to cover taxes and repairs. I also direct that my executors pay to each tenant the sum of three hundred dollars for contents of each house, so I can entail house and contents on their children and grand-children, or, if they have none, then on those to whom they would wish to will their possessions. The houses are not to be mortgaged under any circumstances. If the owners wish at any time to sell and move elsewhere, they can, provided the money derived from the sale of the property is used for the purchase of another home entailed in the same way. And the person buying the house of them must purchase it under the same conditions that it is left in my will.

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

“The income from the rest of my property that is not invested in real estate I leave as a fund to be devoted to helping persons in distress for rent, or to give those a start who have been sold out.

“My lawyer, above mentioned, and Mr. Edward Newton, I name as my executors.

“JOHN TAKALL.

“Witnesses: Clark Justice; Amos Wright.”

“CODICIL.—I give and bequeath to Mrs. Morgan’s little son, who reminds me of my deceased nephew, the sum of fifty thousand dollars.
J. T.”

So absorbed had Mrs. Morgan been in reading the will that she did not hear the doorbell ring, and looked up with surprise as the butler drew aside the portière and announced Mr. Newton.

After the first greeting was over and Newton had expressed his pleasure at their safe return, Mrs. Morgan said:

“I have just read Mr. Takall’s strange will. I did not know he was dead.”

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

“Yes,” answered Newton, sadly, “he has gone to his account, or, rather, it would be better to say of him, to receive his reward. Yesterday I went up to B—— to attend the funeral and to be present at the reading of his will. On the envelope containing it he made the strange request that ‘Home, Sweet Home,’ be sung by a well-trained choir at his funeral. Never have I heard it rendered so beautifully. Then followed the 242d hymn :

“ ‘ Now the laborer’s task is o’er ;
Now the battle day is past,
Now upon the farther shore
Lands the voyager at last.
Father, in Thy gracious keeping,
Leave we now Thy servant sleeping.

“ ‘ There the tears of earth are dried ;
There its hidden things are clear ;
There the work of life is tried
By a juster Judge than here.
Father, in Thy gracious keeping,
Leave we now Thy servant sleeping.’

* * * * *

“ When the music ceased I do not think there was a dry eye in the church.”

A CURIOUS LANDLORD

Many have been made happy by Mr. Takall's generosity, but the kindly face of "The Curious Landlord" is missed by the community of B——.

SEVENTEEN SUICIDES IN A DAY.

PARIS, April 11, 1899.—Seventeen suicides were reported at the Prefecture of Police on Sunday, nearly all of which were due to poverty. Saturday was quarter-day, and many of the unfortunates, being unable to meet the demands of their landlords, in desperation resorted to asphyxiation by charcoal fumes.

JUN 21 1900

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